

MEETING RECORD

NAME OF GROUP: Urban Design Committee

DATE, TIME AND

PLACE OF MEETING:

Wednesday, January 8, 2003, 3:00 p.m., Room 206, County-City Building, 2nd Floor, 555 South 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

MEMBERS AND OTHERS

IN ATTENDANCE:

Members: Dennis Scheer, Gordon Scholz, Kim Todd, JoAnne Kissel and Scott Sullivan

Others: Wayne Teten (Public Works); Jack Lynch (Olsson Associates); Ron Ring (Parsons Brinckerhoff); Lynn Johnson (Parks & Recreation); Ed Zimmer, Duncan Ross and Missy Minner (Planning Department)

STATED PURPOSE

OF THE MEETING:

Regular Meeting of the Urban Design Committee

Approval of meeting notes, December 4, 2002 -

Todd moved approval of the minutes of the December 4, 2002 meeting as distributed, seconded by Kissel. Motion for approval carried 5-0.

Review and adoption of recommendation on urban design elements, Antelope Valley project -

Scheer indicated that the Committee needs to decide on two issues with regard to the draft recommendation on urban design elements in Antelope Valley, a copy of which is attached as 'Exhibit A' and incorporated herein. Is it comfortable with the drafted Committee recommendations on Antelope Valley bridges and landscaping? Is the Committee comfortable with offering its advisory services as the recommendation indicates future involvement of the Committee?

Zimmer stated that Marvin Krout, Director of Planning, has assigned Duncan Ross, Abby Davis and Ed Zimmer to participate in the Antelope Valley project to get Planning more involved. He added that the bridge design process needs to continue to be able to move forward quickly.

Scheer appointed a sub-committee of three out of the pool of four members present to be available so that items needing Committee review aren't held up waiting for the monthly meeting.

Scholz moved adoption of the draft recommendations on Antelope Valley bridges and landscaping, seconded by Todd. Motion for approval carried 4-0, with Sullivan abstaining.

Request to shift control of billboards along the interstate from State to local control -

Zimmer stated that a question had been raised by Mike Brienzo, Transportation Planner with Public Works as to whether or not there would be an issue of repayment to the state. No legal opinion has been sought on that possibility. There is also a possibility that this would be an opportunity for more billboards to be installed.

Todd moved denial, seconded by Kissel. Motion to deny carried 4-0.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:35 pm.

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ADVISORY COMMENTS
by Urban Design Committee
REGARDING ANTELOPE VALLEY BRIDGE DESIGNS
AND OTHER AESTHETIC CONCEPTS
Reviewed December 4, 2002, Adopted January 8, 2003

The committee appreciates the opportunity to advise upon this significant community project, which will have far-reaching impact on the heart of our city. We recognize this comment is coming late in the process and we also recognize that Scott Sullivan made efforts to involve the Committee months ago. We will :

- make some **comments** upon the designs shown the Committee December 4, 2002 by AV designers Scott Sullivan and Jack Lynch (printed as “Antelope Valley/Aesthetic Concepts” August 2002)
- suggest **goals for the design elements** of this project, and
- **propose a process** to achieve those goals.

Design Comments

1. **The project elements, especially the crucial bridges, appear in design and in presentation to suffer from what might be called the D-B-C syndrome—design by committee.** The various elements appear and are described as meeting specific concerns of various constituencies, rather than presenting a coherent and convincing whole.

Excellent projects of any kind require talented designers, clear programs, and wise clients. All of these elements are potentially present in the AV projects but must be consciously organized into their proper roles. The goals described in the AV Aesthetic document of August 2002 are very well considered, but the city has to organize itself carefully into an effective and disciplined “client,” able to communicate clearly with the design team.

2. **The design elements, especially the bridges, appear to lack context in design and in presentation.** Admittedly, the O Street bridge is in a redevelopment area, but its role is much broader than setting the tone for a small area. The stated goal that this bridge be a key element along O Street, creating a sense of arrival on the east side of downtown, is laudable. The bridge should be visible and capable of creating a sense of anticipation at least from 27th St. to the east and more likely from blocks further east.

The design is presented without any indication of how it will perform in the sequence of traveling along O Street, in the sequence of traveling the stream-side trails or enjoying the stream-side park, or in any other setting. The smaller bridges are similarly not shown (nor do they appear designed) to fit within or reflect their varied settings. Use of red brick for bridges is without local precedent and is quite uncommon as a bridge material, which likely will make it appear as just what it would be—a decorative veneer. This material is handsome for buildings, but bridges face extremes—constant weather exposure, salts, vibration, freeze-thaw, and periodic flooding, that have traditionally dictated other, often simpler, sturdier materials. Similarly, the “suspension” cables are without local reference, are purely decorative, and may pose a nuisance-hazard.

3. **The bridges’ most conspicuous elements are unauthentic, likely giving rise to broad-based criticism.** The bridge piers, brick and limestone veneer, and cabling all appear to be structural but are in fact decorative. Decoration is desirable and can or should be delightful. But false-structure as decoration

invites criticism both for appearance and cost. Decoration can either be integral to structure—for instance cast into structural concrete elements, or clearly added for effect, such as beautiful lights, without raising the same questions or concerns. Non-integral elements, like the decorative cabling and even the brick veneer, may be hard to maintain, costly, and at risk for functional failure.

4. **The proposed roadside landscape elements are described as deliberately rejecting local (prairie) references in materials or effects.** Hopefully the landscape design will be distinctive, locally based, and reinforcing of a sense of place. Maintenance and durability (including drought tolerance) should also be paramount concerns. The goal of creating a distinctively urban place is not inconsistent with reflecting a midwestern prairie heritage, especially in park space around a watercourse.
5. **The design elements suggest the project is fiscally unconstrained, which is far from true.** Are millions of dollars available for public art, as suggested? Will a BID be in place for maintenance from the time of initial installation of landscaping, given the very long schedule of implementation of this project? Is cost not a concern in creating bridges' expanded piers, cabling, and veneers?

Design Goals

The August 2002 document “AV/Aesthetic Concepts” articulates strong goals, but fails to depict them consistently.

Antelope Valley design elements should create a distinctive character for the waterway and associated improvements, while respecting lasting elements in their settings. Capitol vistas, Lincoln High and Elliott Schools, Beadle Center and Whittier, all are durable, positive elements of the AV area. Similarly, O Street and the downtown core should provide a strong context for the AV park and O Street bridge.

The bridges should be the most prominent “signature” elements of the AV project: Conceptually strong, this idea requires that similarly styled **bridges fit in diverse locations** from 24th & J (with historic structures such as Antelope Grocery and Lincoln High School, and with a strong Capitol vista) to O Street to Vine and Y Streets. It also requires that the **decisive O Street design** set the tone for all the others, while also functioning as the east **gateway** to downtown and an ornament to the creek-side park. These factors argue for a **simplicity in the design of the bridges** to fit diverse areas and achieve diverse requirements.

- **For simplicity, cost, durability, and broad appeal—let structure be structure and decoration be decoration.** The structural elements of the bridges should be graceful and handsome as possible, but also frankly structure. Consider warmly colored concrete as the primary visible material, perhaps enriched by collaboration with an artist in the casting. As at the new “Nebco building” at 10th and Lincoln Mall and on the new high schools, the newer colored precast concrete elements can be warm, dignified, and of large scale. Above the bridge deck, railings, lighting, and seating can all be functional and decorative—sturdy, elegant, and pleasing—to create a distinctive visual experience for drivers and pedestrians. Reconsider mid-bridge seating for park and Capitol tower vistas. Consider replication of Capitol Square lights for a clean, respected, locally unique element.

The central bridges should be visual landmarks from the park, secure, inviting, and interesting to approach and pass under.

Landscape should be sustainable, maintainable, and hardy. Well-chosen native and other hardy plants can be used to create neat, lower-water, distinctive urban places. The landscape should say

“Urban Lincoln,” not “Anywhere USA.” **Maintenance funding should be considered in design and installation.**

Design Review Process

Urban Design Committee recognizes that the AV projects are complex in organization and governance, and that **UDC functions as an advisor directly to the City of Lincoln. But UDC views the City administration as having an essential role** to play in **organizing** the various parties interested in AV **into an effective client** that can communicate clearly with the design team. **The mayor plays the key role** of setting expectations and holding city staff and project designers accountable for a functionally and fiscally sound, enjoyable, handsome design. By recognizing that **the desired results are not yet at hand**, and **imposing a clear process** to achieve them, the Mayor can lead AV to a winning design.

JAVA should pick a lead agency to spearhead specific projects. Assuming the City of Lincoln is that agency for the AV bridges, parks, and other urban design elements, the city should

1. Adopt a clear statement of design goals and the project budget.
2. Assign a small staff team (drawn from Urban Development Dept., Parks & Recreation, Public Works and Utilities, and Planning) to work closely (and quickly) with the design team, reporting to their directors.
3. Identify which existing design review committees (UDC, Capitol Environs Commission) should review work presented by staff and designers, and to offer advice to staff and policy makers.
4. Require that the designs and recommendations be delivered to Mayor only as the final step. The role of the Mayor and other policy makers (JAVA) is not to evaluate specific design elements, but rather to judge whether the assigned team and committees have successfully overseen the designers in meeting the stated project goals.

*Adopted at a regularly scheduled meeting of Urban Design Committee, January 8, 2003
Moved for adoption by Kim Todd, seconded by Joanne Kissell
Approved 4-0 (Joanne Kissell, Dennis Scheer, Gordon Scholz, Kim Todd voting “aye”,
Scott Sullivan present but not voting--declared conflict, serving on AV Design Team).*